

# Non-native and native speaker teachers' perceptions of a team-teaching approach: case of the JET programme

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## Abstract

*Since the mid 1990s, research on non-native speaker teachers (NNSTs) in foreign language has been received with increasing interest (Illurda, 2005) and various discussions about its scope have been explored. The discussions include the perceptions of NNSTs and native speaker teachers (NSTs) in terms of their performance and the impact of the team-teaching approach. There has been a need for further investigations in the use of team-teaching in Japan, which was instigated during the Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) programme. The aim of this paper is to present multiple implications based on an analysis of the opinions of Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) who are involved in the JET programme. In order to do so, this paper demonstrates that 10 JTEs and 12 ALTs experience vexations and that these compromise the potential of the EFL team-teaching in Japan. Special concentration on the mutual perspectives of JTEs as NNSTs as well as those of ALTs as NSTs makes this study more uniquely constituted and different from others which have been concerned more with the perspectives of either one or the other group.*

## Keywords

*The Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) programme, EFL team-teaching, Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs)*

## Introduction

A team-teaching approach that combines a native speaker teacher (NST) and a non-native speaker teacher (NNST) has become quite common in recent foreign language education. In EFL education in schools in Japan the use of team-teaching approaches conducted by a pair consisting of a Japanese teacher of English (JTE) and an assistant language teacher (ALT) who is a native English speaker has been widespread as one of the major EFL education approaches. It has been led exclusively by a branch of the Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) programme in Japan since 1987. In addition, teachers consciousness of the team-teaching setting has been enhanced due to the political education campaign; the Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'<sup>1</sup>, which can be considered as the most concentrated EFL reform so far in the EFL education history, operated for five years since April, 2003. After this campaign concluded in March 2008, the individual schools in Japan have been given the full responsibility for their own further improvement of the EFL programme and its team-teaching. According to quantitative data collected from major stakeholders, NNSTs of English are crying out urgently for guidance to conduct successful EFL team-teaching approaches in corporation with NSTs of English.

Since the mid 1990s, research on NNSTs in foreign language has been received with increasing interest (Illurda, 2005) and various discussions about its scope have been explored (see Braine, 1999). At the same time, there has been a need for further investigations in the use of team-teaching in Japan, which was instigated during the JET programme. The aim of this paper is to present multiple implications based on an analysis of the opinions of JTEs and ALTs who are involved in EFL team-teaching in Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan, 2003

## Research purposes and method

The research objective of this study is to investigate the perceptions of NNSTs and NSTs in terms of their performance and the impact of the team-teaching approach in the EFL setting in Japan. In order to collect the data, 10 JTEs and 12 ALTs on the JET programme were approached by personal invitation, email and/or telephone. At the time when the interviews were conducted, all of these participants were teaching EFL in schools in Japan. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in the participants' respective first languages and tape-recorded for subsequent analysis<sup>2</sup>. The interview questions were made available to the participants so that they could prepare general outlines and comments about their perceptions.

## The Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) programme and positive characteristics of the team-teaching

The JET programme is organised by the local government in Japan and the other related authorities such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR). It commenced in 1987 with the objective of enhancing internationalization in Japan by promoting mutual understanding between Japan and other nations. In particular, the programme aims to enhance foreign language education in Japan, and to promote international exchange at the local level through fostering ties between Japanese and foreign youth. There are three different types of positions available on the programme; Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) and Sports Exchange Advisor (SEA) (JET Programme, 2007). The focus of this paper is ALTs and their JTE partners.

The team-teaching enables the teachers to excel in creating a great impact and stimulation in their class. This unique landscape may create a setting that is both planned and spontaneous, which causes an interaction in a more proficient manner than the one formed solely students for conversation purpose (Hasegawa, 2004; Page, 1997). In addition to these benefits of the team-teaching approach, this study identified some others. The presence of the ALT team-teaching enables the JTEs to provide further opportunities to use English more frequently in their schools (JTE1, JTE2 & JTE3), and the non-EFL staff to develop an interest in the culture of the ALT's home country that does not have to be restricted by the school's hierarchical system based on age, and teaching experience, background and gender (JTE4). Another benefit can occur when a pair conducting the team-teaching comes to be regarded as two instructors existing in a single class. This means that one can lead the lesson while the other concentrates on monitoring the students (ALT1). In spite of these various benefits as well as the system of the JET programme having been viewed as successful by Neustupny and Tanaka (2004), there was also a wide range of constructive criticism given about what needs to be done to improve the EFL team-teaching environment in Japan (McConnell, 2000). This paper will discuss the programme further in the following sections.

## Critics 1: productivity or temporary pleasure

It may not be legitimate for JTEs to expect the ALTs to conduct their teaching in a professional manner because most ALTs in the JET programme have obtained neither teaching qualifications nor sufficient knowledge of school work. In addition, remarkably, most of them have not worked on a full-time basis, since coming to Japan on the programme immediately after graduating from university. Commenting on the fact that it is common for some teachers to stay and work until approximately 7 o'clock in schools in Japan, ALT2 pointed out the lack of professionalism of most other ALTs in Japan, while commenting on the fortunate situation for the ALTs that they can possibly leave school much earlier<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Direct quotations of all JTEs comments made in Japanese appear in English in this paper after being translated by the author.

<sup>3</sup> The general ALTs' JET working contract requires them to stay at each allocated school until 4:15 on Mondays to Fridays

There was some comment that the ALTs irritate their JTE partners due to their non-professional attitudes, especially lack of punctuality, in a culture where punctuality '... communicates respect and efficiency and tardiness disrespect and inefficiency' (Nishiyama, 2007, p. 219). 'Some ALTs began working at the very last moment. ... As I keep telling them, they usually get adjusted, though. [At the first stage of their appointment] they are not aware of these issues' (JTE1).

Lack of professional experience is distinctively reflective when one faces actual interactive situations, such as an ALT in the classroom. Despite the observation about the successful development of the classroom discipline and management by the team-teaching in the JET programmes (Neustupny & Tanaka, 2004), most ALTs may lose their focus easily when they encounter unexpected circumstances, which is largely affected by their minimum teaching capacity, as was pointed out by JTE1 and JTE5.

*There are some cases in which many students are difficult to control. It is hard to control students. It is about shitsuke (class discipline/management). When I discipline students in an English class, they are apt not to speak [for the rest of the class]. Sometimes I do not want to use Japanese and disturb the lesson [which is mainly conducted by the ALT] so shitsuke becomes difficult. The problem is whether to put emphasis on the outspoken atmosphere or not. I can [easily] scold the students in Japanese, but the ALT is there [and the class is provided with a great chance to encounter the native speaker of English], so the timing and how to do so is difficult. And sometimes the ALT is unaware of the reason why students are being quiet [when they are so after having been scolded]. (JTE5)*

Many ALTs indicated the importance of focusing on the students' misbehaviour during the team-teaching. ALT3 commented,

*Of course, students sometimes think, because it's an English class, they can say anything [and] do anything. So they are like, 'Oh, free talking time!'. And they start screaming, like English means total freedom. And that's really not true. So that's an important lesson to teach. Just because ... I am from a different culture and I have a different value doesn't mean no rules [are expected] in my class. (ALT3)*

To several ALTs interviewed for this study, issues with general classroom discipline did not seem to have been considered carefully by JTEs in some instances. For example, ALT4 recalled the first time she was in the class and was amazed by the JTE's poor ability to handle disruptive students, such as allowing them just to sleep in class and giving paper to students who turned up in the class without any papers, hoping her JTE would realise that this should be his responsibility because of their students' language and/or cultural barrier with her.

As JTE5 commented, '... Being harmonious and having fun does not necessarily mean that it is a fruitful lesson'. A class that is well controlled and disciplined in a satisfactory manner should be a measure of a collaborative team-teaching performance of both ALT and JTE. However, some JTEs and ALTs rely on each other to take the role of the class management and fail to draw the appropriate line between progress of the lesson content and having fun in the lesson. ALT5 confessed her vexing belief that class management is theoretically the JTEs' responsibility. From practical perspectives she insisted, however, that strategies for class discipline, especially for particular trouble-making students, should be developed in discussion between the JTE and ALT, rather than leaving the full responsibility for this to the JTE only.

## Multiple school visits

A poor team-teaching performance arising from discipline issues derives not only from the JTEs' and ALTs' insufficient classroom management skills but also from the working conditions provided by the ALTs. In most instances, the ALTs are required to visit multiple schools within a short time period and to conduct the team-teaching with multiple JTEs. Their team-teaching performances with JTEs will often be unsatisfactory due to the ALTs' unfamiliarity with the ongoing EFL curriculum, lack of knowledge of the students' study progress, elements introduced in the past, flow of the lesson, general students' EFL levels and even each student's characteristic element (JTE5, JTE6 & ALT6). It should be accentuated that if this is neglected the outcome can be that '... the risks always go back to students [and appear as their poor English performance] at the end' (JTE5).

Despite the fact that JTE6 wished for one particular ALT to stay at his school for a long term period, the administrative authority is simply incapable of allocating one to each school in Japan for a particu-

lar long term, because of the declining number of ALTs in the JET programme. Most of the junior and senior high schools in one particular prefecture are conducting team-teaching in their EFL programmes not by having an ALT from the JET programme but rather an ALT who has been sent by some privately operated temporary staff agency. JTE3 is one of the JTEs who confessed her annoyance that the same ALT was not allocated in her school for a longer period, with the result that students in her school may have an ALT in their class once a month. She did not mind this circumstance as long as she continuously had one particular ALT for a longer period, irrespective of who employs the ALT. Rotation or circulation of ALTs in the JET programme among multiple schools obstructs any stabilised relationship with either the JTEs or the students. ALT6, ALT7, and ALT8 all commented on this, and mentioned the fact that it takes time to break through the students' inhibited manner in EFL class and with various staff members in the staffroom in junior and senior high schools, especially in Japan where people are generally not that talkative<sup>4</sup>.

## Critics 2: pressure to complete set-up tasks and create visible outcomes

The content to be introduced in each class is supposed to be scheduled meticulously, overseeing the aim of the week, the term, and the year. And in most cases students' achievements are judged by several formative assessment tasks such as daily/weekly assignments and the vocabulary quizzes, and summative tasks such as a mid-term/end of term written and/or oral examinations. In the longer period, most junior high school teachers are likely to compare their students' achievements with the benchmarked academic standard and requirements such as the high school entrance examination. In the same manner, high school teachers benchmark with the university/tertiary entrance requirement. This trend creates dilemmas for JTEs regarding their team-teaching approaches. JTE2 noted that '... teaching resources [especially for the 3rd year students] are targeting the university entrance examinations so it becomes complicated. So team-teaching itself becomes more difficult; lots of time is required [to prepare]. Similarly, JTE7 commented that 'Especially in the case of *shingakukoo* (schools including high percentages of their students advancing to well-known and reputable higher educational institutions), English conversation is not taken as an important element. It has been put aside in order to let their students get high marks in the university entrance examinations'.

From a theoretical perspective, as many will agree, JTE4 commented, 'Oral, grammar and reading aspects should not be separated but should be taught properly as an important segment. I wish they would be connected with each other, considering that each of them plays a significant role'. From a pragmatic point of view, however, JTE4 said, 'I wish I had some more classes for reading and structures (grammar) only'. The above statements seem to be contradictory, yet this depicts the most common scenario of the current EFL education in Japan, and it is unlikely that it will change unless there are major structural transformations made in the whole educational structure of primary school, junior high school, senior high school and tertiary education. Moreover, one of many JTEs' dilemmas is represented by JTE8's comment below. Sighing occasionally, she told the fact that the study based on the textbook itself is not enough to meet the requirement for the prefecture high school entrance examination standardised in her prefecture.

*There is a huge gap between the elements introduced in the textbook and requirement for the high school entrance examination. ... [Anonymous prefecture's] high schools entrance examination consists of four sections; listening, many long reading passages, English compositions, and a lot of vocabulary. There are three large, different, long passages, so that examinees have to read rapidly. There are many questions such as writing the content of the long passage in Japanese. Generally, we are focusing on the Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities', while the high school entrance examination is not. ... While that gap worries teachers and students, students are undertaking jitsuryoku test (pre-entrance examinations) in term 2. ... Unlike enjoyable English learning at school [with ALTs] and satisfactorily scored mid-term and end of term examinations, they cannot obtain enough scores at the Jitsuryoku test at all due to those many long reading passages. (JTE8)*

<sup>4</sup> The relationship conflict between JTE, ALT and students will be discussed further in the last part of this paper.



## Authority's challenge - *kenshuu* and conferences

Authorities have already been engaged actively in handling various obstacles in order to improve the quality of the team-teaching in the JET programme. The workshop for JTEs called *kenshuu* is one of the strategies to have been introduced. JTE8 explained that the *kenshuu*, running for two days, caused JTEs' annoyance, in terms of its timing. *Kenshuu* which was originally held during campus festival seasons in autumn in Japan, was re-scheduled to February three years ago due to the request of many JTEs. However, this has backfired because it has given JTEs' even more cause for complaint.

*But it is also a hectic season due to shinro [-shidoo] (counselling on students' coming year plans/future course/careers), [I am reluctant to attend kenshuu]. ... Attending the Chuukan kenshuu (mid-term workshop) is so much fun. Talking to ALTs and seeing those from other countries who are engaged actively is enjoyable. But attending the two-day-session leaves all the school duties and tasks behind, which is a burden [after coming back to school]. School teachers are required to spend lots of times on those extra tasks, and as a result, we lose more time to spend for on our particular teaching subject. I really think that is the most important thing [for the authorities] to consider. (JTE8)*

*Kenshuu* seems to be concentrating excessively on the orally motivated team-teaching lesson only, which results in the lack of instances or demonstrations of team-teaching tactics being applied in the lessons in which the emphasis is on reading and/or writing skills. None of the ALTs participating in this research interview, in fact, indicated either that they had tried to improve these skills or that they employed the textbook-focused approach in the team-teaching lesson.

*It is very difficult to organise constant/coherent activities ... [for a long term period]. I can use the knowledge acquired in kenshuu for a couple of lessons. [A satisfactory lesson] is time consuming and ... there are various tasks to complete especially if you are a classroom teacher. I do not feel like utilising [the knowledge learnt in kenshuu] fully in my case. (JTE2)*

*I believe there is a variety of usages of an ALT, not only oral and conversation sessions but also the usage of an ALT in writing sessions should be considered more. In fact I have had an ALT in my former school and sometimes in this school too. We should make use of the lessons with an ALT for writing; essay writing and creative writing more often and develop it further [in the future]. (JTE9)*

## Individual challenges - Uchiawase

In order to prevent team-taught lessons from turning into an unprofitable 'play time', JTEs and ALTs should set regular times for discussion/meeting, *uchiawase*. JTE2, JTE4 and JTE6 pointed out the crucial roles of the *uchiawase* which enable both JTE and ALT to confirm the goal of each lesson and various strategies to achieve it. Some ALTs' comments responding to such suggestions by the JTEs' agreed that the *uchiawase* could contribute to successful team-teaching, because talking together about something fundamental such as weekly topics enables them to draw a picture of the target lesson which makes them feel easily able to prepare in advance (ALT4), and it gives them assurance that the English instruction which is supplied to students and the JTE is clear and simple enough (ALT1). Furthermore, the ideal *uchiawase* also includes clarification of both the JTE and ALT's roles at each stage in class. JTE4 pointed out that using Japanese in the presence of the ALT in front of students in a team-taught class is not denied as long as it is done with careful consideration of its timing. Considering the pronunciation, JTE9 highlighted an intriguing point; JTEs tend to consider that they may leave the responsibility for oral communication classes, including pronunciation or conversation [in English], to the ALTs.

Clarification and understanding of each role in class clearly influence the smoothly organised and implemented team-teaching approach. This philosophy is supported firmly by not only those JTEs but also ALTs. ALT1 below represents the majority of the ALT's comments.

*For me the main negative thing is ... a lack of clarity about who has what responsibility. There is so much in the classroom, leading the lesson in general. ... But [when I was] leading [the lesson] last year, sometimes I was not sure. I wanted to be fully [responsible] and then sometimes if I took control of the class, in fact that I wasn't being as respectful to the teacher as I should be. And the other time, if ... a teacher had an idea and I kind of just... stood there and [was being]*

*just a kind of parrot and did exactly what the teacher told me to do, and [did] nothing more than that, I wasn't pulling my weight. (ALT1)*

Despite its obvious benefits, sufficient time is rarely allocated for an *uchiawase*. Among the ALTs who complained about having few opportunities and insufficient time to talk to their JTEs, ALT3, who was in the last year of her extended contract in the JET programme, observed the recent change of her JTE's attitude towards *uchiawase* on which less time had been spent.

*Especially when I was new [uchiawase was very important]. But I've been here for a while now. So I guess, sometimes you go to school and they say, 'Oh she's got experience'. Like they are seeing me now like 'Oh, she can teach'. So they just don't wanna worry about it. They are busy so they are like 'OK, you can do it easily!' That's what has happened to me a little bit. (ALT3)*

The acknowledgement of its importance does not generate the regular *uchiawase* between JTEs and ALTs in most cases, due to a range of unexpected interventions. They turn into extra tasks for the JTEs in addition to their regular duties. JTE4 regrettably analysed that her current situation to prevent regular *uchiawase* was caused by over 80% of her work being devoted to administration tasks outside English teaching itself. A wide range of problems was discussed, including *seikatsu shidoo* (students' daily life guidance), *shinro shidoo* (counselling on students' coming year plans/ future course/ careers), new tasks introduced for the new school year, creating teaching materials and tests, etc. Issues linked to *seikatsu shidoo* and *shinro shidoo* are commonly accepted as part of a homeroom teacher's duty in Japanese schools where there are no counsellors in psychology or provisions to discuss students' future/after graduation plans.

In the unique case of JTE9, the reason why those *uchiawase* could not be organised sufficiently with that, unlike the official notification that he would be in charge of second-year classes, he was somehow appointed as a first-year teacher in late March<sup>5</sup>. This short notice meant that he had been in a state of chaos until early April disregarding the importance of the certain period of time to be spent for the yearly lesson preparation and resource development.

### Critics 3: respective strength and rapport

All of the JTEs and ALTs wish to have a close and respectful relationship with each other. With such a belief, most of them attempt to foster such professional rapport in order to support each other, but some failed to do so because of various factors. It is especially vital for a JTE to show some respect towards his/her ALT as an educator at an equal level because ALTs are likely to consider themselves as inferior to the other Japanese staff members in the school. The comment below was voiced by ALT11, who had completed her degree with a Japanese language major at university before coming to Japan on the JET programme.

*How we relate to each other. It's not really about teaching. It's just how we relate [at the] social level. I feel that she doesn't respect me as a, like an equal sort of person. ... I know that I am not a teacher. But I feel like I am a kind of treated as a child sometimes with regard to often telling me what to do [and] what to not to do and stuff. So that has been a problem. It's been difficult because I feel like I am always being told what I can't do rather than what I can do, [there is] more I can't do. (ALT11)*

Then ALT11 began explaining about her professional behaviours and attitudes which were pointed out frequently by her JTE, such as using a red pen for sentence corrections, order in the worksheets, not wearing perfume, or coming to school a bit earlier so that she should not arrive on time or just before the lesson begins. Apart from such basics, what frustrated some ALTs further was that they did not figure out what they should know as ALTs as well as inexperienced teaching staff members in the school (ALT11 & ALT12). Also, some ALTs' ability to speak Japanese might be lower than what was expected and considered by their JTE partners (ALT11 & ALT12).

*The fact [that] I can speak Japanese doesn't really mean that I can understand Japanese. ... If I am doing something wrong, people like, you know, look at me and like, 'You are doing something wrong!' and they don't tell me. I am not gonna know - even [though] I can speak Japanese, I am not Japanese. So I can't know everything about ... like Japanese customs and things. I know a lot of things but not everything. ... I think I should definitely have to ask but not all the time, like*

<sup>5</sup> The school year in Japan begins in April.

*people ask me and tell me as well as me asking them and telling them. I think more communications would be good between ALT and teacher. (ALT11)*

## Walking voice-player

The ALTs' self-respect and sense of equality with their JTEs can easily be lost by repeatedly exercising their main tasks, such as pronouncing certain vocabulary or expressions in front of the class. These tasks, because of their simplicity, tend to be a tedious routine, which may lead ALTs to consider themselves as 'voice machines'. This will be likely to happen as ALTs become familiar with their daily living environment and their first school environment and confident with their work duties. However, ALT4, ALT6 and ALT11 pointed out that this, in most cases, cannot lead to any special actions but can help them to carry out their roles patiently and quietly.

These cases are partly the effects of the ALTs' self-confidence after spending some time in the team-teaching environment. Lack of recognition by JTEs may damage the respect of the ALTs critically. Acknowledging the JTE's attitudes towards her, ALT10 indicated that she was expecting more trust and respect from her JTE partner. ALT10 found her to be passive progressive, at an equal level as a teaching staff member in the school. It is intriguing to note that some JTEs are not fully conscious about this point because the following uncomfortable situation was also caused by the JTE's manner towards her teaching partner. ALT7, a native speaking teacher, acknowledged that translation from English to Japanese is occasionally necessary when students have difficulties following the class. While highlighting this, she still believed her JTE partner needed to change her attitudes and concepts towards team-teaching. This was particularly evident when she saw students becoming confused when listening to her JTE partner utter some English words oriented in the pronunciation of Japanese Katakana syllabic writing. A number of foreign originated words are usually learned and memorised first by novice learners of EFL, so the learning of English primarily through the Katakana phonetic patterns may obstruct the process of acquiring the English phonetic system (Makarova, 2004). ALT7 regretted having hinted to one of her JTE partners to discontinue that obvious incorrect English practice in class. She sensed she might have offended the JTE, while she still hoped for her JTE to follow her suggestions afterwards in the future lessons.

*When students do not understand, JTEs try to translate into Katakana English. ... If I say a word like dog, they won't translate that into Japanese but they translate it into Katakana English for the students, like doggu. So the students copy the Japanese teacher. I feel that's totally against the point of teaching proper pronunciation. ... JTEs feel like the students understand better by saying it in a Japanese-English way. But it's not very productive for students, I feel. (ALT7)*

ALTs' awkwardness could be observed further in relation to the hierarchical system within schools in Japan. A unique experience was revealed by ALT3, when a new teacher was appointed in her school. It was this new teacher's first ever teaching position so there were occasions for ALT3 to teach her about their school life. This, however, made ALT3 fall into an uncomfortable position because she was an assistant with no teaching qualifications and no great confidence in her ability in the Japanese language, which naturally made her status lower than her JTE partner as well as the other regular teachers. Instead, ALT3 partly and modestly taught the new teacher about general school duties and routines from scratch. She made use of her slightly older age than the new teacher and her longer teaching experience and greater familiarity with the target school life as a staff member. However, her understanding that her status was lower than any staff member in the school made her feel awkward and hesitant to respond to any enquires coming from the new teacher.

## ALTs' isolation

ALTs expressed their concerns about their level of communication not only with the JTEs but also with other non-EFL staff in their schools. ALTs are given a plenty of non team-teaching free time in their schools, which can eventually lead to a sense of isolation. As revealed by ALT3, ALT5 and ALT6, ALTs can easily become bored during school hours and feel that they are being left out of the group of staff members. Those ALTs are fully aware of the fact that those staff members do not speak to them much because they are usually so caught up in their own busy schedules and do not have enough spare time left to share with the ALT. Observing an ALT in such an isolated situation, JTE6 expressed

his view that non-EFL teachers, especially those who share similar ethnographic backgrounds such as age and gender, should accept ALTs more actively in order to demolish invisible hurdles existing between JTEs and ALTs at a social level.

The closeness of relationship between non-EFL staff members and the ALT can also be affected by factors such as the non-EFL staff members' English ability, their personality, communicative competence and most importantly, their attitudes towards welcoming and accepting the ALT as a vital member of the school staff rather than a temporary visitor. This has to be treated with great care, because if ALTs wish to be treated as non-visitors to the school, then they should also make an action to approach those various staff members in the school. In this case, again, language as a medium can be a barrier. JTE2 expressed alarm about potential conflict, citing the example of her former ALT who was persistently speaking Japanese, and commented that the JTE and ALT need to have a sufficient and coherent discussion about their language use outside the EFL class.

*There is an ALT who felt that he was not recognised as a human being but only an English speaker. I feel like I understood that. But ALTs can earn their salaries by speaking/demonstrating their English. I had some difficulties like that. (JTE2)*

JTE2 admitted that this ALT had not had any experience with the Japanese language before he came to Japan on the JET programme. This contributed to further conflict between them as well, concluding that maintenance of the ALTs' professional responsibility, cultivation of rapport, and respect for each other are very difficult to build, especially in a simultaneous manner.

One particularly intriguing case described by JTE8. Although the relationship between ALTs and non-EFL staff became dysfunctional, their attitudes towards each other's groups gradually improved as time passed by. They were fully aware of the dysfunctional system but made spontaneous actions in order to cope with the situation successfully. Still, JTE8 accentuated that JTEs need to play an important role of liaison between ALT, non-EFL staff, and their students in order to help to create a harmonious rapport.

*Not all ALTs necessarily have teaching experience. In fact, there are more ALTs who do not [than those who do]. There are ALTs who like or dislike contacting people, and those who let me think that being an ALT is the reason for coming to Japan. In these cases, JTEs have a very hard time establishing positive relationships between ALTs and students, and ALTs and other teachers. I had an example like that in recent years. (JTE8)*

There is a tendency that JTEs and ALTs do not implement any particular strategies, but leave the situation of the ALT being isolated as it is, expecting a third person's assistance, although some ALTs, in fact, do initiate actions such as discussing the matter with the prefectural advisors or other ALTs on the JET programme.

## Discussion and implications

The aim of this study is to present implications, led by an analysis of the opinions of JTEs and ALTs who are involved in EFL team-teaching in Japan. Main findings of the problematic elements from JTEs and ALTs perspectives were revealed in the three categories; (1) productivity or temporary pleasure, (2) pressure to complete set-up tasks and achieve outcomes, and (3) respective strength and rapport such as the above. In this section, therefore, possible multiple implications will be suggested.

### Implications for (1): classroom management and discipline

Scale and quality of the classroom management and discipline in Japan can be varied according to the stage. Generally speaking, Japanese children at the pre-primary stage are neither disciplined nor well-behaved. This attitude transformed drastically into the opposite at the stage of primary school throughout the whole of Japan. Nevertheless, behaviour of those at junior high schools and senior high schools depends heavily on each school. According to the Wakazono (2001)'s research based on survey collected from 203 teachers from primary school, 109 from middle schools and 54 from high schools, 25% of them expressed their experiences in the problems linked to the classroom management. Possible causes include 'a) an increase in the number of children who are not disciplined by their parents at home (77%), b) a decline in the quality of education at home (71.9%), c) a decline in



the quality of teachers (51.1%), and d) children's psychological problems and stress (45.1%)' (cited in Sakui, 2007, p. 43)<sup>6</sup>.

Most JTEs and other Japanese teachers tend to rely on personally and empirically cultivated guidelines rather than collecting expertise knowledge and strategic plans in order to minimise the management problems. It may not be logical for ALTs to seek solutions from their JTE partners with the class management strategies based on such individual experience. University students who wish to obtain the teaching certificate in Japan usually have to undertake a unit consisting of sessions held before and/or after the teaching practicum, which do not fully cover the practical issues of class management problems, and participate in the teaching practicum under the supervision of a teacher who has been on the teaching practicum under identical conditions as above for the period of two to eight weeks. In other words, most current JTEs are also still in the process of attempting to foster their own confidence and tactics. This might be the answer for ALTs who are faced with JTEs have difficulty controlling their students' misbehaviour.

Nevertheless, the JTEs' professional experience might be responsible for overcoming a lack of confidence in the ALT and improve a poorly managed class. Naturally the productive communication with the JTE seems to be the only, but valuable, solution for an ALT. An undisciplined class tends to create a situation in which both the JTE and the ALT find it difficult to draw a clear line between the vital oral exercise in English or recreation time using English in their team-teaching. Thus they should take care to interact and communicate constantly with each other. It was intriguing to have identified that most JTEs in the interviews agreed with the integral part of the discussion with their ALTs, in the pre-lesson discussion and spontaneous confirmation in mid-lesson but entirely overlooked the post-lesson discussion.

The multiple school visits required by the authorities cause ALTs further pressures and frustration. This chronological phenomenon, and one of the major problems encountered on the JET programme, prevents ALTs from forming a bond with students and colleagues in their school. This type of impediment can be addressed by a helpful solution, which is that JTEs invite ALTs to observe some non team-teaching lessons. In this situation, ALTs should not necessarily be required to do anything specific but are more likely to concentrate on observing the lesson itself. Ideally, however, the lesson observation opportunity should occur over one week before the role of ALT commences (Page, 1997). This helps the ALTs to be equipped with a greater understanding of what has been covered previously and of the students' EFL levels in the target class. It also gives an understanding of the unique rules, culture and habits in the class and the whole school, while processing Schon's knowing-in-action learning which is '... the learning of specific language, conventions, knowledge and patterns' (Nicholls, 2006, p. 166). Consequently, this type of active engagement reduces the ALTs' spare time which is usually spent alone in the staffroom. Some might raise the concern that this could become routine activity which tends to be monotonous. In order to enhance the stimulation, there are five applicable patterns such as (1) following one teacher one day, another teacher another day, (2) following various teachers on the same day, (3) observing a range of ability groups within the same year group, (4) integrating observation with some "in-class" support, and (5) following a class through a morning of lessons in different curriculum areas (Page, 1997). It is crucial that both JTEs and ALTs are engaged actively and enthusiastically with each other in order to systemise this period of induction in school and '... for the development of understanding regarding the intellectual act of teaching and how this can be enhanced and as a consequence of such enhancement improves student learning' (Nicholls, 2006, p. 166).

*Obviously it is important for teachers to speak English just normally. But the best JTE I had ... was like, [he] had me to speak English in class but, [he said], 'I like having you to come to my class because obviously you are foreign and an English speaker. So you are the reason that I have to speak English. When you are not in the class, it not natural to speak English in the class.' And that was great. That was really great to hear, because I think that's a good reason. That's a good justification for the JET programme. When there is a foreigner in the class, there is a reason to speak English in the class. (ALT3)*

*I think it's also beneficial for me to come to classes where the teachers are teaching by themselves. But I am there for pronunciation and to help to answer the questions and even just to observe the teachers to learn about how they teach. Also ... I can get to know the students a little*

<sup>6</sup> Empirical research about classroom management and discipline is extremely limited in the teaching contexts in Japan (Sakui, 2007).

*bit and ... [it makes it] easier [for me] to follow the curriculum. So then [it] ... gives me more information so I can better plan the lesson in the future. ... I think with teaching in general, it's important that [there is] some kind of relationship with students to know something about it. And usually I feel like I don't know anything about my students, because I just don't have enough interaction with them. Especially in one of the schools, they have invited me to more classes. If I go to the same class a few times, I start to recognise the students, and I know which students might need extra help or things like that. So I can feel [I am] a better teacher, you know. Usually..., almost every class I go to, it's like a classroom with strangers. I don't know anything about that. I don't know how much English they know. I don't know which one is good at English and which one is bad at English. I don't know which one loves English or hates English. I don't know anything about them. So it's hard to teach someone that you don't know anything about. (ALT6)*

## Implications for (2): development of approaches and significance of constant liaison

JTE1 and JTE8 segregate their own lessons; those in which the team-teaching approach is engaged and others paying attention to particular aspects. Although the landscape of 'exam-oriented grammar and translation-focused core English teaching, stay unchanged' (Smith & Imura, pp. 39-40) and the values of the team-teaching with ALTs regarding students' communicative ability might not increase, their uncomplicated strategies may be essential in order to maintain the balance between four macroscopic elements: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

*But there are some certain points to progress regarding reading and writing, so I should set them up, maintain the pace of the lessons, and adjust the lessons using resources focused more on reading/writing [in order to reach them]. (JTE1)*

*While they are in school, I try to introduce games and some activities. But the [presence of the ALT] slows the pace and progress of textbook teaching. So ... when they are not present, more writing tasks are introduced. (JTE8)*

It can be suggested from the analysis of these data that ALTs are currently not fully utilising their value and roles especially during the examination season. One of the typical examples can be discovered from ALT7's comment;

*Some schools keep me very busy, so I teach 15 lessons a week. And some schools ... barely use me at all, and I'm used a few hours a week. So it depends on which season, which [has the] exam period ... . Some schools don't like to use the native English teachers if it's around exam time, which I really don't understand. (ALT7)*

Although the compulsory examination system including an oral component in each school and educational institution, seems to be only an articulate tactic, this might be unrealistic for the university entrance examinations, especially the centrally organised examination in Japan, which attracts over 500,000 examinees each year (The Daily Yomiuri, cited in Guest, 2008). Nevertheless, it is possible to establish the vital part of the students' English communication ability in the end of each term examination in each school. Urgent systematization of compulsory oral testing in each school, which can be derived from an authority such as Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), will largely influence the attitudes of JTEs towards the usage of their ALTs through the whole school year including the examination season. So deconstruction and reconstruction of the examination system including the assessment of oral interactive ability, is demanded urgently in order to tackle this problematic issue.

In addition to this, textbook team-teaching styles should be required and encouraged more by demonstrating the potentials and benefits to improve not only students' oral skills but also others such as reading and writing. Accordingly, the authorities, in fact, describe the benefit of engaging with the team-teaching for textbook centred lessons as well. However, many JTEs seem to believe that the team-teaching is to be organised for the purpose of oral communication only or that they cannot afford to introduce it in textbook-based lessons due to the numbers of tasks that have to be achieved, as discussed above. Such conceptual dilemmas existing between JTEs and the authorities can be discovered clearly from ALT9's comment below.

*[At the kenshuu] We had to create a lesson plan to share with the group [and] they asked us to use the English-1 textbook. But most of us do not teach English-1 classes. We teach oral communication classes. ... [So I thought,] 'Great. We made a lesson plan that we can't use. Now*

*we are going to share it'. That's useless. That was the first day. And on the second day they taught debate in the classroom. ... Maybe [it is] a nice idea. But in my school, there is no way we can use debates, because they can barely put [English words] together in a sentence. (ALT9)*

In special intensive training sessions such as *kenshuu*, from which participants naturally expect to gain further knowledge and skills, it is essential to demonstrate clearly the commonly prevailing idea, which is that the team-teaching can be employed only for oral communication focused lessons and to scrutinise further the cause of this among JTEs, and the authorities.

It is essential that the JTE and ALT participate in the meeting together and discuss the carefully prepared and guided lesson plans and aim and achievements on a daily basis. The consistent discussion helps ALTs to clarify and understand the JTE's intentions, and the weekly, monthly and term basis aims at optimising student achievement. Despite the productive *uchiawase*, some lessons do not gratify either the JTE and ALT or the students: 'It could be my excuse as a JTE, but there were some cases when I relied too much on the ALT or I could not put my teaching intention into the ALT's lesson well' (JTE9). Various researchers, including Brandt (2008), Nicholls (2006) and Scrivener (2005), found that lesson evaluations done through a mentoring process are highly influential on the quality of teaching, and the question arises as to where self-evaluation and/or after-lesson commentary are demonstrated in some way.

This research discovered that while there are many JTEs and ALTs who insist that the *uchiawase* organised prior to the lesson is essential for successful team-teaching, regular but informal back-up reviews and critique sessions tend to be neglected entirely. After having admitted that reviewing does not usually occur after each class, JTE4 considered it as being potentially more beneficial than pre-viewing the lesson for the team-teaching itself since one can identify the positives and challenges clearly. ALT1's comment below echoes that of JTE4, while ALT10 indicated that she could have improved her distant rapport with one of her JTEs if she had obtained clear comments afterwards from her JTE regarding each team-teaching lesson.

*The teachers... never said to me, 'I want you to do this', '[You are] not doing this properly', 'Please change this'. I've never got that kind of feedback. If I am working in an Australian school, I know that I get a lot more criticism if I haven't successful lessons. In Japan, in this school, the teachers never criticise me and actually I find it incredibly frustrating. Sometimes I want criticism. ... I don't think ... something has to [be held] after every lesson. But... it should be possible to have the discussion if either the ALT or the JTE is not 100% satisfied with something. (ALT1)*

*I guess it's because she could have given me criticism that was helpful. But she never gave me helpful criticism. She would just say, 'This is wrong', or ... even not say, 'This is wrong'. She would imply that was wrong, and this would make me feel like, 'Yes, something is wrong'. But I didn't know what the problem was. I think that's Japanese culture, though. Right? So that was hard to deal with when I first arrived. Now I think I am used to it. But I still get frustrated with the same person for the same reason. Now I feel like she is just deliberately making me feel like there is something wrong even when I don't think there is actually a problem. (ALT10)*

Both JTEs and ALTs should be aware of the critical role of the concentrated feedback and reflections provided by each other after the lessons.

### **Implications for (3): overt indication of each other's role**

ALT6's decision to return back to her home country rather than renewing her JET programme contract for the second year was mainly due to this feeling of uselessness which arose from her large quantities of free time in the school. With full awareness of such conflicts, JTE10 has developed his philosophy of '... providing the opportunities for them to rustle and play an active part' (JTE10). And this has resulted in all of his former ALTs having renewed and extended their contracts at least once during their maximum three-year stays in Japan on the JET programme.

*I heard that there was an ALT who had read one book per week since he/she came to Japan. So to speak, he/she was not given any tasks. There are many cases in which ALTs feel lonely or so forth and go back to their home countries in the middle of their contracts. ... My policy is to make use of the ALT as much as possible. That is their task and one of their purposes to be in Japan. (JTE10)*

The inactive approach of ALTs certainly creates a distance from the other staff in the school, and vice versa. In order to activate themselves, they need to obtain personal comments and appreciation from each other. The acknowledgement from JTE to ALT, for example, may be regarded as the sign of the JTE's respect towards the ALT. Yet, how many JTEs make this action, as well as how many ALTs clearly indicate their respect to their JTE partners in return? Lack of interactiveness contributes to the ALTs' sense of incapability and the loss of self-esteem. Most ALTs usually remain passive and patiently accept the given unsatisfactory situations (ALT1 & ALT6).

ALTs also need to alter their attitudes and make their own efforts to access non-EFL staff and students (JTE8 & ALT12). For example, ALT2 and ALT12 purposely invested their spare time in creating further relationships with their colleagues after school, such as staying late with other staff members and having some more time to interact when the stress of the day had faded away, or helping or observing after-school club activities, while ALT3 greeted incoming students outside the school after arriving relatively early every morning, or JTE8's former ALT helped her students to clean up the classroom during the daily scheduled clean-up time. Asking the JTE to join in the non team-teaching EFL class could also be beneficial. For example, ALT6, as mentioned earlier in this paper, enjoyed demonstrating and correcting some pronunciation and walking around the class to field students' concerns or questions spontaneously under such a stress-free and responsibility-free atmosphere. These tasks are all out of responsibility, yet certainly result in mutual understanding between JTE and ALT, as well as students.

Mutual understanding can be enhanced by the ALTs showing clearly that they would like to become a part of the team and to implement these active engagements. To take initiative for an action rather than waiting for another's offer or suggestion, seems to create the sense of belongingness (McConnell, 2000). Building this kind of relationship does take time for ALTs to understand (JTE8 & ALT2), but may be the key to success for the future team-teaching. Below is the case of ALT10 who failed to apply this theory in the early stage of her contract and subsequently wanted to provide a warning to the prospective ALTs in the JET programme.

*Say, trying to make a better friendship with work-colleagues and spend some time outside the work. So when I first got here, everyone was really interested in me. They said, 'Oh we used to go to all the ALTs houses for dinner'. But I never invited them around to my house for dinner. Never. I went out to dinner with a few teachers. But I never invited anyone around to my house. But that's because when I first arrived here, I was so involved in other JET activities with other JET [participants]. ... [They were] social gatherings with other ALTs. ... It was like a big party for the first year. So in my first year here my work life was so bad. Actually after I worked every day, I didn't wanna spend any more time with Japanese friends. So maybe I missed the chance when I first arrived to make a really good strong friendship with my colleagues, especially English teachers, because I just wanted to go home and get away from the school. Maybe I should have been trying hard to be involved. (ALT10)*

## Conclusion

It has been over two decades since the first EFL team-teaching induced by the JET programme began in Japan. While several distinctive changes have been made, this study has demonstrated that both JTEs and ALTs have experienced vexations and that these have compromised the potential of the team-teaching in the programme. It should be accentuated that special concentration on the mutual perspectives of JTEs as NNSTs as well as those of ALTs as NSTs makes this study more uniquely constituted and different from others which have been concerned more with the perspectives of either one or the other group.

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